

## 10 Tips for Being a Healthy Board of Directors\*

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*Having the right people at the right time during the life of an organization is a significant accomplishment for any Board of Directors. Ensuring everyone is working together with a common focus and complimentary efforts is an even bigger accomplishment. Below are some tips for intentionally fostering a well-functioning healthy Board.*

*\*These tips have been written for not-for-profit Boards. However, much is also true for other Boards.*

1. **Respect the leadership of the Board Chair.** This person is tasked to ensure the Board meets its goals and work plan, facilitate meaningful meetings, as well as support and encourage the work of the ED, individual Board members and Board committees. The Chair needs your respect and cooperation therefore if there is tension in your relationship with the Chair, it should be addressed right away.
2. **Meet regularly.** There is always much work to be done. To ensure the ongoing strengthening of your organization, meeting once every 4-6 weeks is important. Meeting regularly means each member knows what is going on, is available to offer timely leadership, and the Board accomplishes the goals in its work-plan.
3. **Expect full engagement at each meeting.** A Board is only able to accomplish work when and if all Board members are authentically engaged and active in their responsibilities and volunteer tasks. A Board that only comes to approve minutes or receive information of decisions already taken (sometimes known as “a rubber stamp Board”), is not helpful in building a strong and healthy organization.
4. **Agree to ongoing confidentiality.** Inevitably the Board of Directors needs to discuss challenging issues concerning staff, the ED, leadership, stakeholders and clients. It is imperative that everyone commits to and understands that these conversations are *confidential* and are not to be discussed outside meetings. This code of conduct will help build trust and respect in and outside the boardroom.
5. **Communicate a “single” message.** The Board of Directors needs to feel and be seen as having a common message. Whether talking to friends, family members, potential donors, or clients, the messages coming from the individual Board members should be clear and consistent. This will help build confidence in the strength and leadership of the Board and its members.
6. **Foster community and teamwork.** The better your Board of Directors can work together the more you will accomplish. The stronger the sense of community and teamwork, the more likely your Board members will be a positive and active participant for their entire term (and beyond!). People need and want to feel like they are contributing to something important – that together they are making a difference.

7. **Agree on a common focus.** Whether Board meetings and Board activities focus on the organization's vision and mission or the Board goals and work plan, a common focus must be at the centre of each discussion. To ensure this solitary focus, the Chair and Board members should make it a common practice to review their focus at their meetings.
8. **Hold each other accountable.** As part of a team, we need to celebrate our accomplishments as well as hold each other accountable for promised work and agreed on Board responsibilities. When the ED, individual Board members, or a Board committee agrees to work on something or complete a task, the Board needs to feel confident it will be done. It is healthy and helpful for the Chair to monitor the progress of all work and hold people/ committees/ teams accountable for assigned tasks. To monitor this effectively and efficiently, the Secretary should clearly note all assigned tasks and completion dates in meeting minutes.
9. **Support your ED or President.** This is the responsibility of the Board of Directors, with the Chair as lead. Supporting the leadership can include: requesting regular reporting and checking in, annual performance review with concrete recommendations for growth, open and regular communication, and request for specific work to be done. Just as the ED is responsible for leading his/her staff, the Board is responsible for leading its ED.
10. **Agree on annual goals and a work plan, and evaluate them regularly.** In order for a Board of Directors to effectively and efficiently help an organization and its ED to grow and flourish, it needs a "roadmap" or plan. Having annual goals and a work plan attached to these goals will ensure you know what you are working toward/for, and how you will get there. An end-of-year formal evaluation of these tools is essential for knowing what the next steps/goals should be. Quarterly reports are also helpful.